



Roadfood: The Coast-to-Coast Guide to 800 of the Best Barbecue Joints, Lobster Shacks, Ice Cream Parlors, Highway Diners, and Much, Much More

By Jane Stern, Michael Stern

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For road warriors and armchair epicures alike, the seventh edition of *Roadfood* is the key to finding some of the tastiest treasures in the United States. The indispensable companion for savvy travelers nationwide, *Roadfood* is now bigger and better than ever. Totally revised and updated, the seventh edition covers over 700 of the country's best local eateries, including more than 200 brand new listings along with up-to-date descriptions of old favorites.

An extended tour of the most affordable, most enjoyable dining options along America's highways and back roads, *Roadfood* offers enticing, satisfying meal-time alternatives for chain restaurant-weary travelers. The Sterns provide vivid descriptions and clear regional maps that direct people to the best lobster shacks on the East Coast; the ultimate barbecue joints in the South; the most sizzling steakhouses in the Midwest; and dozens of top-notch diners, hotdog stands, ice cream parlors, and other terrific spots to stop for a bite countrywide.

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Editorial Review

Review

“[ROADFOOD] is a bible for motorists seeking mouth-watering barbecue or homemade pie.” --*USA Today*

About the Author

JANE and MICHAEL STERN are the authors of more than forty books, including *Square Meals*, *Chili Nation*, and six previous editions of *Roadfood*. They write the “Roadfood” column in *Gourmet*, the winner of three James Beard Awards for Best Magazine Series, and are regulars on public radio’s *The Splendid Table*. They host the interactive Web site, Roadfood.com, which Yahoo declared “site of the year,” and frequently contribute book reviews to the *New York Times*. They live in Connecticut

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CONNECTICUT

Abbott’s Lobster In the Rough

117 Pearl St.

Noank, CT

860—536—7719

LD May—Labor Day, then weekends

through mid-October | \$\$

Abbott’s is renowned for chowder and lobsters, both of which have defined seafood excellence in eastern Connecticut for decades. The chowder is a style unique to southern New England shores: steel-gray, briny, full of clam flavor, plenty of clam meat, and a handful of potatoes; and the lobsters are steamed to perfection. But beyond these glories, Abbott’s posted menu suggests a whole range of other fine seafood items: steamers, mussels, clams and/or oysters on the half shell, hot lobster rolls that are nothing but buttered pink meat on a bun, lobster salad rolls (cool, bound with mayonnaise), crab rolls (hot or cold), and shrimp salad rolls. There is even broiled chicken for the lost soul who finds himself at this great seafood restaurant craving poultry.

Abbott’s is a very pretty place to dine al fresco. Seating is at bare wooden tables (although civilized sorts bring their own tablecloths as well as their own wine); the air is filled with the salt smell of shore breezes, and background music is provided by gulls screeching in the sky (but kept away from the tables by invisible netting).

Big Dipper Ice Cream Factory

91 Waterbury Rd.

Prospect, CT

203—758—3200

\$

Here is irrefutable evidence that ice cream makes you happy. The girls behind the counter, no matter how fast they scoop on a busy summer night when the line for cones and cups goes clear out the door, are delighted to be Big Dipper folk. Many of them are high school girls, some are older women who started here

in high school but enjoy coming back during vacations because they consider themselves part of the Big Dipper family. You will understand their bliss when first you taste the amazing toasted almond ice cream, which the boss says was originally inspired by a vintage Good Humor bar, but which we say transcends it.

If this particular flavor is not your idea of heaven on earth, don't worry. The Big Dipper has a few dozen others, ranging from silly (cotton candy) to swank (café Vienna, which is coffee and cinnamon) to serious (espresso). All are rich in butterfat (16 percent), but not so rich that they cloy. These are ice creams we can easily eat double and triple dips of, several times a week. The repertoire changes daily, but you always can count on toasted almond.

Blackie's
2200 Waterbury Rd.
Cheshire, CT
203—699—1819
LD (closed Fridays) | \$

Blackie's just may serve the best hot dog in Connecticut, a state with some of the highest hot dog consciousness in the nation. While there are a couple of other items on the menu (hamburgers, cheeseburgers), hot dogs are so entirely the specialty of the house that most regular customers sit down at the counter and simply call out a number, indicating how many they want.

The dogs are pink Hummel-brand plumpies that are boiled in oil to the point that they literally blossom with flavor as their outside surface bursts apart. They are served plain in basic buns, and it is up to each customer to spoon out mustard and relish from condiment trays that are set out all along the counter. That's the really good part about dining at Blackie's: dressing the dogs. The mustard is excellent, and we recommend a modest bed of it applied to the top of each wiener, all the better for the relish to cling to. The relish is transcendent: thick, luxurious, dark green, and pepper-hot enough that your lips will glow after lunch. Blackie's—and its customers—are so devoted to this formula for frankfurter perfection that the kitchen doesn't even bother to offer sauerkraut or chili.

Blackie's is a charming destination dog house, especially in good weather when the long counter offers semi—al fresco seating. Service is nearly instantaneous, so if your preference is *hot* hot dogs, it is entirely practical to order them one by one until you can't eat any more.

La Borinqueña
992 Bank St.
New London, CT
860—437—0408
LD | \$

“La Borinqueña” is the title of the anthem of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, but a lot of regular customers know this cute little eat-shop by the name on the sign outside: Roast Pork Café.

It's an apt name when you consider the magnificent pork sandwich that is the signature dish. It is made of pork shoulder, roasted all night until the skin is as crisp as bacon and the inside is velvet soft. The meat is cut with a scissors into variegated shreds, chunks, and strips that are piled inside a long hero roll, preferably with a layer of Swiss cheese and some mayonnaise, then toasted in a sandwich press that converts the potentially fall-apart sandwich into a tidy tube. The pork packs an amazing flavor punch; it is salty, redolent of spice, and dripping juice. While it is possible to have a “Cuban” sandwich, to which ham is added, and even a

tripleitas (pork, ham, and steak), we love the simplicity and intensity of pork, cheese, and bread.

In addition to magnificent sandwiches, the Colón family offers fried chicken, roasted chicken, and such fascinating side dishes as yucca patties, green banana patties, and meat-stuffed potato balls. There is a lunch special every day, including fried pork chops and breaded steak on Monday, with a choice of white or yellow rice on the side.

The restaurant's interior isn't much more than a tiny kitchen and order counter. Seating is outdoors at picnic tables, and all meals are available to go.

Carminuccio's

76 South Main St. (Route 25)

Newtown, CT

203—364—1133

LD | \$

One of the lesser-known culinary gold mines in Connecticut is Route 25 between Monroe and Newtown. A garish, congested patch of two-lane with more than its fair share of *un*interesting places of business, it happens to be home of at least two superb hot dogs (at the Botsford DriveIn and Mr. Mac's Canteen), nice Italian sandwiches (at Panino's), plus a number of promising diners and cafés we have yet to try. One of the reasons we haven't done a whole lot of homework on this stretch of road is that we are so often drawn to Carminuccio's. Here in Connecticut, home of America's most delicious pizzas, this house by the side of the highway serves some of the best.

When you walk in, it isn't much to look at. The interior consists of an order counter and a small array of bare-topped tables with a glass case in back holding cannoli, stuffed breads, and a few pasta dishes. If you look to the right as you enter, you will see a most appealing sight: pizzas being made to order. Available toppings range from basic cheese to escarole and beans, barbecued chicken, sautéed spinach, and a knockout BLT combo of pesto sauce, bacon, sautéed escarole, and roasted tomatoes. Pepperoni and sausage are generously applied; we especially recommend roasted peppers. These meaty little squiggles are radiant with flavor, and just wonderful on a pizza with nothing other than cheese. As for the crust, it's Neapolitan style, meaning it is fairly thin with a chewy rim of crust all around the circumference and a brittle undercrust with enough grit from the oven to give it real character.

Beyond the pizza, do pay attention to the stuffed breads. These are fat savory loaves wrapped around such ingredients as ham or capicola, pepperoni and cheese, broccoli and sausage. Served steaming hot, one of these breads is a soulful meal every bit as satisfying as a pizza.

David's

1647 Route 85

Chesterfield, CT

860—442—7120

LD (summer only) | \$

One of our favorite sunny summer day drives is along Route 85 just west of the Thames. There, in Chesterfield, we pay a visit to our favorite rock 'n' fossil store—Nature's Art—and go across the road for thick cardboard plates piled high with excellent whole-bellied fried clams (strips are also available).

The menu at this cheerful drive-in is eat-in-the-rough fare with a Greek twist. The twist can be tasted in the

form of spinach pie—a plate of savory, well-spiced spinach-and-feta-and-phylo served with French fries and cole slaw—but the list of non-Greek items are such Yankee shore standbys as shrimp, scallops, and calamari—each fried to golden goodness, as well as top-drawer fish ‘n’ chips.

While the fried food is exemplary, the sleepers on David’s menu are grinders. These are some mighty hero sandwiches; their fillings ranging from demure tuna salad to a spectacular *steak bomb*, which means the sliced beef is topped with sautéed onions, peppers, mushrooms, and cheese. And, this being a Greek-run kitchen, we recommend paying close attention to the gyro and chicken gyro grinders. They’re immensely satisfying versions of the street-food sandwich, particularly good with a pile of David’s fresh-cut French fries. For dessert: homemade rice pudding.

Chez Lénard
Main St.
Ridgefield, CT
No phone
LD | \$

Chez Lénard of Ridgefield has no address and no phone number. It is a sidewalk cart on Main Street with no tables or chairs. Accommodations for dining include sidewalk standing room and Ballard Park across the street. Some car customers pull to the curb, toot their horn, and get their meal delivered to the window without ever leaving the driver’s seat.

Despite the lack of amenities, Chez Lénard is indubitably high tone. When the original “Lénard,” a Manhattan rat-race refugee, parked his cart here in 1978, he established an urbane ambience with a French accent that has thrived under subsequent proprietors’ incumbency. Citizens of Ridgefield have come to treasure the happy incongruity of a man in a billowy chef’s toque exclaiming “oo-la-la!” as he slathers on hot relish, or “*merci beaucoup*” when making change. The blackboard menu lists such exotic-sounding delights as “Le Hot Dog Choucroute Alsacienne” (with sauerkraut and mustard), “Le Hot Dog Excelsior Veneziano” (with Italian peppers and sautéed onions), and “Le Hot Dog Façon Mexicaine” (a chili dog).

The dogs themselves, plucked with tongs from a hot water bath in the cart, are *magnifiques*: kosher all-beef franks with a taut casing and firm insides, long enough to stick out from both ends of the bun, and buxom enough that a pair of “Supremes” (with mustard, relish, ketchup, and chopped onions) with a can of Dr. Brown’s soda make an immensely satisfying meal.

Chez Lénard is open year-round, every day except Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas or when the weather is extremely awful. “I am pitied in the winter,” says proprietor Chad Cohen. “But I am envied in the summer. For me, this is always a great job because everyone I meet is happy. Who isn’t happy when they eat a hot dog?”

Doogie’s
2525 Berlin Turnpike
Newington, CT
860—666—1944
LD | \$

A second Doogie’s is located at 560 Chase Ave., Waterbury.

Doogie’s boasts that it is “home of the 2-foot hot dog,” but in our experience the hot dogs are significantly longer than that. Closer to thirty inches. While one of them, in its yard-long bun, looks like a party sandwich

for a table of eaters, especially if it is loaded with sauerkraut, chili, onions, bacon, cheese, etc., you will see some big boys walking into Doogie's at lunchtime and ingesting a pair of them (that's about six feet of frankfurter!) with a large soda and an order of jumbo French fries with cheese sauce on the side.

If only for its size, Doogie's hot dog would be worth noting in the annals of amazing Roadfood; but the more important fact is that this extra-long sausage is delicious. Firm-fleshed and with a chewy skin that gets slightly charred on the grill, it has a vigorously spicy flavor that holds up well not only under any and all extra-cost toppings but also when spread with Doogie's superb homemade hot relish or just ordinary mustard. The brand name of the dog is Grote & Weigal, and for those of meek appetites, it is available in mere ten-inch configuration, too. Mention must also be made of the bun, which of necessity is significantly sturdier than your ordinary cotton-soft hot dog roll. More like a grinder roll, but somewhat slimmer, Doogie's bun is actual, good-quality bread! We have never seen anyone actually pick up a whole hot dog and bun, though. Etiquette for eating one of these fellas is to grasp one end eight to ten inches from the tip and tear off a section that would be about the size of a normal frankfurter anywhere else. You'll get about four of these per dog.

Beyond hot dogs, Doogie's sells all sorts of other sandwiches, New England—style clam chowder, a real hot lobster roll, and that junkiest of junk foods, so beloved hereabouts—fried dough. Doogie's version, a plate-size disc of deep-fried dough, is available veiled in cinnamon sugar or under a blanket of red tomato sauce. Either way, it is a mouthful!

Hamburgers, cooked on the same charcoal grill where the hot dogs are made, have a delicious smoky flavor. The top-of-the-line hamburger is described on the menu as "the ultimate"; and while not as awesome as the elongated hot dog, it is quite a sight: two five-ounce patties with bacon, cheese, grilled onions, and sautéed mushrooms. Its formal name on the menu is the Murder Burger.

Casual in the extreme, Doogie's is a serve-yourself joint (adjacent to Ruth's Chris Steak House, which might be a good fallback if you arrive after 8 P.M. when Doogie's closes). Step up to the counter, place your order, pay your money, and wait for your name to be called. When your order is ready, tote your tray to the condiment bar, heap on what you like, find a molded plastic seat in the square little dining room, and prepare to feast on the king of all weenies.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Cynthia Briscoe:

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